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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CAIRO 008615

SIPDIS

NSC STAFF FOR SINGH

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/15/2015

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [EG](#)

SUBJECT: EGYPT: FIRST-STAGE RUNOFFS IN THE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

REF: A. CAIRO 8602

[B](#). CAIRO 8556

[C](#). CAIRO 8555

[D](#). CAIRO 8554

[E](#). CAIRO 8546

[F](#). CAIRO 8501

Classified by ECPO Minister Counselor Michael Corbin for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

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Summary  
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[1](#)1. (C) Polls officially opened at 8AM and will close at 7 PM on November 15 for runoffs in the first stage of the People's Assembly elections, which launched on November 9. Runoffs are being held in 62 constituencies in five provinces including metropolitan Cairo, representing about 80 percent of all constituencies contested in the first stage. Domestic monitoring groups, who had representatives at the majority of polling places, have issued preliminary findings citing access problems, voter list problems, and scattered reports of (apparently minor) violence and harassment. Emboffs in the field observed a very strong and high profile Muslim Brotherhood (MB) presence at almost every polling station. Alienation from the GOE and strong affinity for the MB were in evidence in rural Giza, while in the warrens of central Cairo we observed a virtually open "vote market" in which citizens were paid LE 20 (about USD 3.50) by one candidate and LE 50 (about USD 8.75) by another for their votes. Today's races mainly pit ruling NDP candidates against either "NDP renegades" who are running as independents after they failed to get the party nomination, or MB candidates, who are also competing fiercely, in two-thirds of the races. Results will probably be available sometime on November 16. End summary.

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Observations by Domestic Monitors  
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[1](#)2. (SBU) The Independent Committee on Election Monitoring (ICEM), led by Saad Eddin Ibrahim's Ibn Khaldoun Center, claims that 50 percent of polling places failed to open at the official 8 AM start time. Another domestic monitoring group, the National Campaign for Monitoring the Elections (NCME) also cited a number of polling places that did not open on time. At several polling places visited by poloff on November 15, local citizens made similar assertions.

[1](#)3. (SBU) As of late afternoon Cairo time, there have been very few reports of violent incidents. ICEM reported that two of its observers were harassed. In Giza an ICEM monitor was harassed by supporters of a local NDP candidate and in Assiyut an ICEM monitor was "interrogated" by police. NCME reported skirmishes between supporters of NDP and MB candidates in the constituency of Badrasheen, next to the Saqarra step pyramid, and in Bandar Shebeen, in the Delta province of Manoufiya. ICEM cited a skirmish between MB and NDP supporters in Assiyut.

[1](#)4. (SBU) ICEM complained of arbitrary decision-making by local electoral officials, some of whom allowed ICEM's monitors to enter polling stations and others who did not. ICEM noted that some local electoral officials cited a "new directive" reversing the stated policy of allowing domestic monitors access to polling places. ICEM also noted that in a number of polling places, representatives of opposition candidates (all Muslim Brothers) were denied entry. (Under Egypt's electoral law, every competing candidate has the right to post a representative in polling places to observe balloting and counting.)

[1](#)5. (C) At every polling place visited by emboff on November 15, MB affiliates confirmed that they had a representative posted inside, but they expressed concern that they would be ejected at counting time (as they were, they alleged, on November 9). NCME's initial report asserted that at a polling place in Minya, security forces systematically denied entry to voters suspected of being MB supporters. (Note: This is the first allegation we have seen this election season of security forces blocking access to polling places.

End note.)

16. (C) NCME and ICEM are both citing widespread problems related to voter lists, frustrating many would-be voters who were unable to cast their ballots because their names could not be found. This was also a leading complaint at all the polling places visited by emboffs.

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Snapshots from the Field: Alienation in Rural Giza...  
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17. (C) Poloff visited the impoverished constituency of Ouseem, a densely populated village in Giza province, about 10 miles north of the Giza pyramids. Supporters of Muslim Brotherhood candidate Mahmoud Amer appeared to have saturated the area, with loudspeaker trucks, ubiquitous banners, and even a parade of about 20 7-10 year old boys, many carrying sticks and marching in formation, chanting "Islam is the solution." At least 100 villagers quickly gathered around poloff, eager to share their opinions and complaints. Among the things we heard:

-- "We are sick of the NDP. They do nothing for us. Look at the roads you drove in on. We do not even have running water in this village."

-- "The NDP MPs are corrupt. All they care about is getting free services from local businesses. In exchange they promise to 'fix their taxes' but they do nothing for the poor."

-- "I would vote for anyone who cares about the people. The MB or anyone else, but never the NDP."

18. (C) At least five different citizens we spoke with at random intervals in Ouseem repeated allegations that local GOE officials, either State Security agents or the "Umda" -- the GOE appointed mayor -- were spreading the word, in some cases door to door, that anyone who votes for MB candidate Amer will find himself in jail. One citizen claimed that the Umda in the neighborhood was going door to door, offering 10LE as an inducement to vote, but warning that a vote cast for the MB would be a "big mistake."

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...and the Vote Market in Maniyal  
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19. (C) In Cairo's Maniyal constituency, just two miles south of the Embassy, poloff witnessed numerous flagrant instances of vote buying by both the NDP, on behalf of candidate Mamdouh Makki, and by supporters of the "Independent" (i.e., NDP dissident) Ms. Shahinaz Al-Naggar. At the three polling stations we visited, representatives of both candidates waited outside of the polling stations. The representatives gave voters entering the stations pre-printed cards with the respective candidates' names and other information.

110. (C) Inside the polling stations, according to voters and candidates representatives with whom we spoke, voters would cast their votes for their "choice" and then have the pre-printed voting card certified in the station by the official candidate agents who were observing the casting of ballots, along with the judges, inside the stations. When the voters emerged from casting their votes, they met again with the representatives who had supplied them the pre-printed cards, and exchanged the cards either for a cash payment or for a chit to redeem for cash at the offices of the respective candidates.

111. (C) Several of the campaign workers outside the polling stations attempted to conceal their activities from poloff, once they realized who he was, but several others sheepishly described the process in detail to poloff. Poloff saw at least 15 campaign workers, each surrounded by small throngs of about 10 voters each, at the Abou Saoud polling station in Maniyal who were all engaged in this vote buying process. Cash, voting receipts, and chits for payment were all publicly displayed. According to one NDP worker worried about his candidate's hopes for success, the Shahinaz campaign's ability to pay LE 50 per vote (about USD 8.75) exceeded the Makki camp's self-imposed limit of LE 20 (about USD 3.50) per vote.

112. (C) For its part, the Muslim Brotherhood was aggressively combating such transactions. At several polling stations in the downtown constituency of Abdin, poloff saw groups of MB supporters chanting "today they'll buy your vote and tomorrow they'll sell you out." An MB pamphlet poloff collected in Abdin warned citizens that selling their votes was "forbidden by Islamic Shari'a." An MB campaign volunteer at another Abdin polling place told poloff "MB supporters are honest...They may take the money, but they will still vote for us."

